

Women 'lured' to hospital, says home birth group

The maternity services committee of the Health Department's board of health is bent on luring women back into hospitals to have their babies, says an Auckland midwife, Mrs Joan Donley.

She quoted a recent policy statement from the board which asked: "How can we protect the lives and IQs of our future citizens and counter the move away from our hospitals?"

It said some women who demanded home deliveries could be doing so as a protest against regimented, institutional care. A few women insisted on a home delivery even though in high-risk categories.

Mrs Donley said if a doctor or midwife delivered a stillborn baby at home they would be ostracized by the medical profession.

"There would be no chain of responsibility like there is in a

hospital," she said. "The medical profession would look to fix the blame on them."

"If the baby dies, it will be because of the home birth — not because of any 'inevitability' or error of judgment. The profession would throw the book at them and the doctor or midwife would have no support among medical colleagues."

Auckland's four midwives attended about 200 home births a year and the trend was increasing, she said.

"The demand is beyond our ability to cope, so frequently ladies have to go into hospital. But imagine how these 200 beds and babes a year affect the hospital clinic status with a falling birthrate.

"In fact, with the increase in doctors and the decrease in birth rate, the number of births a doctor is estimated to be 161 by 1981 — a drop from 700 a doctor in 1962."

Mrs Donley said there were times when hospital technology could "save the day."

"We do not advocate home birth for everybody — only as a viable alternative for those who want it and can meet our conditions, such as no smoking and a good diet."

The maternity services committee meets next month to consider changes in regulations to maternity services.